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ABSTRACT

This "First Teachers" training manual details a research-based and field-tested program in which elementary school children and their families create a family portfolio album of their stories and drawings that becomes a family keepsake. The manual provides information on the goals of the program and its intended audience, and the need for schools to support parents as their children's first teachers. The manual also describes the four learning centers visited by families at school during the program: (1) talking, at which families are provided with prompts to share stories about their lives and cultures; (2) writing, at which a story draft is written based on the child's retelling of the story; (3) drawing, at which the child represents the story in a drawing, and the family and the child talk about the drawing; and (4) computer, at which the story may be entered, edited, and printed. The manual presents the 5-step approach to launching the program through securing school commitment, recruiting participants, implementing the program, monitoring its implementation, and evaluating the program on an ongoing basis. Hints on implementing the program effectively are provided from the field-test of the program. The manual concludes with a list of 25 print and web site resources on family involvement in their children's education. (KB)

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FIRST TEACHERS

A Training Manual

For Developing An After-School Family Literacy Program Using Technology

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Anastasia P. Samaras, Ph.D.

This training manual can be used as an accompaniment to:

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Contents

- Introduction
- Overall Program Goal
- Specific Program Goals
- Audiences
- Families are Children's First Teachers
- Overview: A 5-Step Approach
- School Commitment
- Recruitment
- Monitoring
- Evaluation
- Program Learning Centers
- The Talking Learning Center
- More Talking Ideas
- The Writing Learning Center
- The Drawing Learning Center
- The Computer Learning Center
- Helpful Hints
- Resources
- Books
- Articles
- Electronic Sources

FIRST TEACHERS
Training Manual

Introduction

Question: What is First Teachers after-school family literacy program all about?

Answer: First Teachers is a research-based and field-tested program where children and their families create a family portfolio album of their stories and drawings that becomes a family keepsake.

Overall Program Goal

Question: What is the major goal of this program?

Answer: The major goal of this program is to empower families to know about their children's learning and to be involved in promoting their children's literacy.

Specific program goals

Question: What specifically is this program designed to accomplish?

Answer:

- to invite families into the school and into their children's learning
- to promote families' advocacy for children's literacy through dialogue, writing, reading, and technology
- to facilitate the documentation of families' stories, culture, and interests
- to connect teachers with families enabling them to hear the environmental forces that have shaped families' lives, schooling, and dreams for their children

Audiences

Question: Who can use this program?
Answer:

- Parent Groups
- Teachers
- Administrators
- School Districts
- Community Agencies
- Service Learning Groups
- Teacher Education Programs

Families are Children's First Teachers

Question: Why should I participate?
Answer:

- Research supports the importance of family involvement to children's success in school.
- Families and children make life-long connections through storytelling.
- Stories teach children about family values, character, and culture.
- Teachers and families get to know each other in the First Teachers Program.

Program Learning Centers

Question: How does this program work?
Answer: There are four learning centers that families visit at the school site.

- Talking Learning Center
- Writing Learning Center
- Drawing Learning Center
- Computer Learning Center

The Talking Learning Center

At this center, families share stories about their lives and cultures. Talking ideas are available and are an easy way to begin. For example:

- I remember the first time I...
- My grandmother told me...
- My favorite trip as a child was...
- If I could have one wish...
- A difficult time that tested my true character was...
- My dreams for my children are...

More Talking Ideas

- Tell your child about a time you felt special.
- Talk about an old family photograph together.
- Watch television and share your reactions.
- Let children ask you questions, e.g.,"Tell me about when I was born."
- Interview a grandparent or elder in the community and talk about the biography together.
- Do a good deed together and talk it.
- Talk about how the world could be a better place.
- Brainstorm ideas for teaching peace.

The Writing Learning Center

- After talking about a story, a story draft is written based on the child's retelling of the story.
- Writing assistance may be necessary but children's writing is encouraged and kept.
- Scribbling is the first stage of writing.
- The story can be of any length and quality.
- Encourage the process of writing and let the story flow. You can edit at the Computer Center.

The Drawing Learning Center

- Children can represent the story in a drawing.
- The family member and the child talk about the child's drawing.
- Writing can be included with the picture.
- Hand-drawn or computer-drawn pictures can be made and saved.

The Computer Learning Center

- The family types the story on a computer.
- Editing and refining the story occur at this center.
- The story can be narrated to a scribe.
- The story is printed.
- The story is saved for the family album.
- An extra copy can be printed and given to the child to read again and posted at home.

Overview: A 5-Step Approach

Question: How do we launch this program?

Answer:

- School Commitment
- Recruitment
- Implementation
- Monitoring
- Evaluation

School Commitment

- ❑ Administrators, teachers, and family participants agree to coordinate, communicate, and collaborate regularly.
- ❑ Confirm continuous and consistent administrative and teacher support in advance.
- ❑ Teachers agree not to use this time to "tell on" students.
- ❑ Underscore the importance of teachers' promotion and involvement for the program's success.

Recruitment

- ❑ Grassroots efforts work best. Talk one-on-one to families in high-activity zones at school.
- ❑ Build from a cohort of active participants.
- ❑ Recruit a parent coordinator to work with you.
- ❑ Ask families to share their experiences in the program with other families.
- ❑ Advertise at parent-school meetings and at school activities.
- ❑ Children can create posters. Also use flyers, school newsletters, school announcements.
- ❑ Children are the most active recruiters and motivate families to be involved.

Implementation

Coordinate, Communicate, and Collaborate

- ❑ Program facilitators are essential.
- ❑ Schedule days and times ahead of time.
- ❑ Consider the space and room layout.
- ❑ Obtain and organize writing, drawing, computer, and computer printing materials.
- ❑ Secure a writing processing software.
- ❑ Coordinate with the school on any security issues for room usage and equipment.
- ❑ Use a computerized sign-in and sign-out process.

Monitoring

- ❑ Encourage interaction among families.
- ❑ Distribute short-term and long-term calendars with days, times and note any school closings or early dismissals.
- ❑ Check for any problems in facilitation, space, materials, storage, security.
- ❑ Assure that a program facilitator is always present for any technical assistance needed.
- ❑ Assist families in printing and storing stories
- ❑ Involve education majors at a nearby university to work with families and to help administer the program.

Evaluation

- ❑ Conduct internal and ongoing evaluation with participants through conversation and surveys.
- ❑ Obtain feedback from teachers and administrators of the program progress.
- ❑ Request family participation in exit interviews.
- ❑ Ask families to share their experiences in the program with teachers and administrators.
- ❑ Provide opportunities for families to showcase their family portfolio at a pot-luck dinner.
- ❑ Distribute Certificates of Participation to families at school assemblies.

Helpful Hints

Question: What do we know from field-testing this program?

Answer:

- First Teachers works best with family, not just parental involvement. Any family member or significant other is welcomed to work with the child.
- Encourage families to arrive and depart as their schedules permit.
- Allow for families to express themselves freely without fear of exposing low literacy level or spelling errors.
- Building trust with families and teachers is key to program success.
- Respect families' privacy and private time together.
- A computer manipulation phase helps build rapport and establish trust.
- Tuesdays and Thursdays are high participation days.
- Consider organizing a cooperative arrangement for families to assist each other with younger siblings who come along.
- Award families with Certificates of Participation, not extrinsic rewards. Learning and family time together are their own rewards.

Resources

Question: Where do I go to get further information about family involvement?

Answer:

- Books
- Articles
- Electronic Sources

Books

Department of Education (1994). *Strong families, strong schools.* Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.

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Paratore, J. R. (2001). *Opening doors, opening opportunities: Family literacy in an urban community.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

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Scott-Jones, D. (1984). Family influences on cognitive development and school achievement. In E. W. Gordon (Eds.), *Review of research in education* (Vol. 7). Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock.

Swap, S. M. (1992). Parent involvement and success for all children. In S. L. Christenson & J. C. Conoley (Eds.), *Home-school collaboration* (pp. 53-80). Silver Spring, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Electronic Sources

- The National Parent Information Network: www.npin.org
- National Parent Teachers Association: www.pta.org
- Parents for Public Schools: www.parents4publicschools.com
- Education Planet: www.educationplanet.com
- Parent Stages: www.parentstages.com
- Gifted Resources Home Page: www.eskimo.com/~user/kids.html
- Parents' Edge: www.parentsedge.com
- Community Update: available at http://wwww.ed.gov/G2K/community
- U.S. Department of Education: 1-800-LEARN

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